

Letter from Taizé

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5

October – November 1996

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THE SUMMER MEETINGS IN TAIZÉ

Between the Continents, A Common Language

Week after

week, from February to November, tens of thousands of young adults visit the hill of Taizé, animated by the same desire to meet others and to have an intense experience of prayer.

Whether they come from Russia, Japan, Malta, Lithuania, Bolivia or Zimbabwe, all are able to find a common language made up of silence, openness and trust.

The large summer meetings began in July, with three thousand participants per week. There were four to five thousand each week during the month of August, reaching a high-point the first week of August with close to seven thousand present. On Saturday evening, at the end of the weekly meeting with Brother Roger at the church, Samuel, a boy from the village of Taizé, reads the list of all the nationalities present so that they can be given flowers by the children surrounding him. Some weeks, he mentioned as many as seventy-five countries.

The presence of Russians continues to be impressive. There are not only the groups from Moscow, who have to travel by coach for three days and three nights, but also those who come from further away, for example young people from Siberia who have a fourteen-hour train ride just to reach Novosibirsk. From there they go to Moscow, to board the shuttle buses that link the Russian capital with Taizé.

Every week is different, with its strong points and its particular accent according to the countries represented. The obviously discreet presence of two young men from Shanghai, who spent a month and a half in Taizé this summer, did not go unnoticed, even during the large crowds the first week of August.

Each Saturday afternoon, a special gathering enables those who come from far away to share with others elements of their culture as well as some of their experiences, which express the commitments they undertake at home for Christ and the Gospel.

The Orthodox bring their feasts with them, which are not always well-known

in the West. Saint Elijah was celebrated with the Romanians, and Saint Olga and Saint Vladimir with the Russians. On the feast day of Saint Vladimir, an Orthodox priest from Moscow blessed the water of the spring which is now pumped up to the small outdoor chapel at the north of the church, and which also flows inside the church, in a corner of one of the extensions. On August 15th, an Orthodox celebration replaced the morning prayer; a Bulgarian priest and deacon, assisted by a beautiful Belorussian choir from Minsk, transported everyone to the East for an hour and a half.

Each year, several young people from black Africa who are studying in Algeria come to Taizé. Among them there was a young man from Chad who was the last person baptized by Bishop Claverie, recently assassinated in that country. The continual presence of young South Africans, often from Soweto, also adds a lot to the meetings. And then there was the visit of a group of women from Sudan, which remains engraved in the memories of those who met them.

Among the Asians, there are always young people from India and the Philippines. It was wonderful that four Pakistanis could spend the summer in Taizé. And for a fortnight, a young man and woman from Bangladesh impressed everyone: both handicapped, in wheelchairs, they work in a home in Dakhla where handicapped persons are cared for. Both are Hindu, and they were accompanied by a young Muslim.

From Latin America, there is the almost constant presence of young Mexicans and Chileans. Others come as well,

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Taizé
EUROPEAN
MEETING OF
YOUNG ADULTS
Stuttgart
28th december
- 1st January 1997

THE EUROPEAN MEETING
OF YOUNG ADULTS
IN STUTTGART

Stuttgart

Beginning in mid-September,
a dozen meetings were
held in Stuttgart and its
surroundings.

Representatives from different parishes could thus receive more precise information on the preparation for the European meeting and share their expectations. Small preparation teams are being formed in the districts and they are beginning to inform those around them, proposing times of prayer and looking for places in families.

Some brothers of Taizé are already in Stuttgart, with young people from Taizé who will spend several months visiting parishes, groups and schools. At the

heart of the preparation, a midday prayer is being held in one of the central-city churches each day.

Throughout the summer in Taizé, young people from Stuttgart expressed how happy they were to host and to prepare this experience of Church. They know that much of the meeting will rest on their shoulders; they will have to take on many responsibilities and as a result a beautiful reality will become more visible, the face of the Church as a place of hospitality and reconciliation.

Reflecting on the meaning of the upcoming European meeting, some young Germans expressed their thoughts and their desires. Others talked about what had changed in their own city as a result of past European meetings:

"In my parish in Munich," said Dorothee, "the pastor was afraid during the period of preparation that his co-workers were becoming too involved and were neglecting the normal work of the parish. In fact many did help out, and not only those who usually were active in the parish. After the meeting, I felt that even if there was no immediate follow-up such as a regular prayer, something had changed radically. It was first of all a confirmation for all who were actively involved in the preparation, and the joy of having accomplished what had seemed im-

possible. Many have kept in touch with their guests and they still visit each other. Looking back, what seems essential to me is being able to communicate that our action in the world, if rooted in silence, can be much more efficient. Meditative prayer has nothing to do with a rejection of the world; it gives us the strength to keep going in the world."

"What fascinated me during the European meeting in Paris," said a boy from Bavaria, "was the atmosphere of the city. I arrived ahead of time and found the oppressive atmosphere you find in every large city, with anonymous crowds rushing everywhere. As soon as the meeting began, the city was transformed. There were more people, but everyone was so alive and happy to be together. I am looking forward to seeing Stuttgart changed in the same way."

"I noticed how my neighbourhood had changed," said Michaela from Vienna. "What a surprise when an old woman sat down beside me on the bus and began to explain the neighbourhood to me, thinking that I was one of the participants who had come from outside the city to the meeting!"

"During the European meetings," emphasized Ute, a chemistry student, "I am always struck by the hospitality. I wonder how our German families will welcome guests, and I hope they will not complicate what can be simple. In Wrocław, the family that welcomed us gave us the keys to their house. It's true that they were working, but they wanted to offer hospitality all the same. When they gave me the keys I saw it as a very strong sign of trust."

"I live in a small village near Stuttgart," she continued. "It is already a rural area, and it seems so hard to get things moving. We are often frustrated in our attempts, and that discourages us. Over time, tensions have grown between the generations, with each blaming the other. But now, we want to go beyond these tensions and in the new parish council, young adults have been chosen who will help to create links among all."

"In addition to working with children and with young people, we organize celebrations and parish festivals. During the season of Advent, we prepare a Christmas market where we sell handmade objects to earn money for a development project. Last year we chose the theme of communion. Many people told us later that they had rarely felt so touched in a church."

"In the final analysis, I think we are an active parish. But we have a tendency to try and be perfect, and this quickly becomes a handicap. We should learn to live with greater trust and remember that on account of our faith in God we are together on the road. Then we shall find ways of going beyond our tensions."

Preparations for the European meeting are not only taking place in the Stuttgart area. Throughout Germany, many are asking themselves how they can share in the welcome: "I live in the North," said Marit, "and it will be important to take part in welcoming young people from throughout Europe. We have a great need to go beyond the barriers that remain between us in Germany, and if together we are responsible for welcoming others, we will learn to trust one another more quickly. I also see the importance of Catholics and Protestants working together. With some others we have agreed to support a parish in Stuttgart that will need help."

The preparation has also begun throughout Europe. Those who will take part in the European meeting are invited to meet regularly to pray together, to reflect on what it means for them to be part of the "pilgrimage of trust," and to prepare themselves to live this stage together. Themes for reflection for the preparation are proposed on page 3 and contact addresses on page 7.

From Romania:

"I took part in the last four meetings," said Cristina from Timisoara. "Each meeting was different. For us the important thing was to discover what is happening in parish groups. For years, it was impossible for us to organize ourselves in the parishes. I am discovering a lot, but I see that we are only at the beginning. When I return home, I have a lot to tell, but I remember that at first I didn't know what to say because we are so used to not trusting each other and hiding the truth."

"It was wonderful in Poland that we stayed in families. I hope that in this way our mutual prejudices will fall. In each nation, there are people who want peace and comprehension. It's important for me to feel that I am accepted by others."

THE DEATH OF BROTHER MAX

Brother Max died on August 15, after a long battle with cancer, on the eve of his 75th birthday.

Max Thurian was born on August 16, 1921 in Geneva, Switzerland. He was one of the first seven brothers who, in 1949, made a life-commitment with Brother Roger, who founded the community in 1940. The liturgy, sacramental theology and the search for ecumenical convergences were his passions. He wrote a number of theological works on topics including Mary, confession, the Eucharist, marriage and celibacy, the priesthood and the essentials of the faith. He was ordained a priest in Naples, Italy, in 1987.

The funeral was celebrated in Taizé on Sunday, August 18. Brother Roger spoke the following prayer:

In the communion of all our brothers who have gone before us into eternity's life, in the communion of our dear brother Max, we can pray:

Jesus our peace, when there are hours of sorrow in our lives, you love us all the more.

And in the depths of our being you come to place your Holy Spirit, who brings that comfort so indispensable to keep us going forward, to help us pass through trials.

Risen Christ, you cause a flame to flare up in us. That flame may be quite faint, but already it shines in our darkness.

Taizé
EUROPEAN
MEETING OF
YOUNG ADULTS
Stuttgart
28th december
- 1st January
'96/97

At the end of this year, tens of thousands of young adults from all the countries of Europe will be welcomed in Germany, in the town of Stuttgart. A new stage in the "pilgrimage of trust on earth," it will be the nineteenth European meeting prepared by Taizé. Taking part in the European meeting means preparing oneself to foster reconciliation on all levels, in the human family as well as in the midst of those around us in our daily life. The welcome in families and parishes helps us to discover, in a tangible way, that peace and trust are possible among people who are very different.

Stuttgart

To prepare, to register...

The common prayers, the times of group reflection root the search for the meaning of life in a communion in God. Meeting witnesses to a commitment on behalf of others, in parishes and neighbourhoods, helps us to take on responsibilities in our own situation.

For the European meeting to go well, each participant must take part in all that is proposed. An attitude of attention and openness to others, especially from other countries, is vital. The time of preparation should provide a foretaste of the meeting itself, so that those who register know what they are committing themselves to, so that they can consciously decide to take part in all the prayers and meetings. The preparation takes place on a regional basis through meetings and prayers which will be organized from September on.

The following questions can help this preparation:

What motivates me to set out towards other Christians who are far away? Am I ready to take a similar step towards those who are nearby? Who can I set out with? Who do I know around me who would be happy to take part in this stage of the "pilgrimage of trust," in this experience of discovering the meaning of the Church and of being open to others? How can I propose it to other people beyond my circle of friends and acquaintances? Can I take a time of silence now and then to review my life, to pray simply while listening to God, and to see what consequences the "pilgrimage of trust" has in my daily life? The pilgrimage to Stuttgart calls for an inner attitude of openness, of attentiveness to others. How can I begin by opening myself to those who need me here and now? The starting-point of the pilgrimage is the local community. How can I look for ways, from the very beginning of the preparation, of maintaining and deepening links with different groups and local Christian communities?

Practical Details

Date: Arrive Saturday morning, 28th December 1996 between 7am and 12 noon. Depart Wednesday afternoon, 1st January 1997.

General programme: Participants will be welcomed by families and local church communities throughout the city. Morning prayer each day will be in one of the local churches of the neighbourhood where you are staying. Then meetings in small groups with other participants and with local people. Each day — midday and evening — there will be two common prayers for all participants of the meeting together. In the afternoon, workshops on various themes.

Accommodation: Simple conditions — with families, in schools and in church halls. Bring sleeping-bag and lightweight mattress.

17 to 29 year olds:

— those who can help, as animators in parishes or as team-leaders for practical tasks, or in the choir group, need to arrive on Thursday 26th December, between 8am and 3pm. (Arrival not possible on 27th December.)

— those who arrive on 28th December choose one of three ways of taking part:

participation in the life of parishes of the city (this is the main group) the silence group (has its own separate accommodation) while still participating in the life of a parish, helping in a team that has a practical responsibility (meal distribution, church team, choir group). It is still possible to join such a group on 28th December.

16 year olds may come to the meeting only if accompanied by an adult over 18, with each adult accompanying no more than four 16 year olds. Arrival: 28th December — not before. All take part in the main group during the meeting: "participation in the life of parishes of the city".

Adults over 30: the European Meeting is intended for young adults under 30, however a few adults over this age can also come, in particular if they are leading groups of young adults. We ask older adults (over 45) to consider sponsoring a young person to come from a church, chaplaincy or school in their area, instead of coming themselves. Adults over 30 all participate in the main group, and arrive on 28th December (not before). Those who cannot accept the same simple accommodation conditions as the young people

and who need a "real bed" should indicate this on their registration form.

Families with children, and people with a disability who need special accommodation should contact Taizé — best by telephone in October or November — to arrange this.

The contribution to costs expected from each participant has not yet been set exactly. For young people under 30 from Britain, it will be in the region of £45 for the whole meeting; more for adults. As well as the hire of meeting-halls and equipment, this covers all meals and a public transport pass.

Send in your registration form by 1st December at the latest. Further information will be sent in November to those who register earlier. Send the form to Taizé either directly or through the person leading your group (page 7).

Travel:

— from Britain: for special coaches to the meeting contact "Skyliners", Flaval House, Caldwell Road, NU-NEATON, CV11 4NB. Tel: (01203) 325682 / 328410 Fax: (01203) 354626

— from other countries: write to Taizé for information.

REGISTRATION FORM

Send before 1st December to:

"European Meeting", Taizé Community, 71250 TAIZÉ, France. Tel: (+33) 385.50.30.02 (9-11 am and 3.30-5.30 pm); Fax: (+33) 385.50.30.16.

First Name

Family Name

Address

County or City & State

Post code

Telephone :

Occupation : Age:

(Circle "Yes" or "No" or complete where necessary)

☒ I'm coming alone / with a group from the town of.....

led by

☒ For adults (over 30 years) and those who cannot sleep on the floor: I need a

bed: yes / no if "yes", say whether you are (please circle): woman

man couple family with children disabled person

helper of disabled person

☒ I will arrive on 28th December: yes / no (arrival time between 7am and 12 noon)

☒ I will arrive on 26th December (17-30 year olds only): yes / no

☒ to help with (please circle): animation / work teams / music team.

N.B. If for any reason you are arranging your own accommodation, please send us the address where you will be staying.

All the Gospels, between the itinerant ministry of Jesus and the events which mark the end of his life, from his arrest until his violent death, reserve an important place for a final evening which the Teacher shares with his most intimate disciples. It is a kind of formal farewell, which serves as a transition between, on the one hand, the teaching of Jesus in words and deeds and, on the other, his disappearance as a man among men. Jesus makes use of this last meeting to sum up his message and to

Gospels, this meal is linked to the Jewish Passover, one of the three high holy days that mark the liturgical year (Ex 23,14-15; Deut 16,1-8). Formed by the fusion of a pastoral celebration with an agricultural one ("the Feast of Unleavened Bread"), Passover became a memorial of the liberation from slavery in Egypt. At the centre of the feast, a so-called "fellowship offering" or "sacrifice of communion": a lamb "without blemish" was offered symbolically to the Lord by each family, slaughtered by the priest and returned

press its unity and its identity, before undertaking its pilgrimage to the four corners of the earth.

Let us first examine the heart of the story for the synoptics, the Passover meal itself. Surprisingly, there is no mention of the lamb (Ex 12,3), which is at the centre of the Jewish meal. In place of this, the gospel-writers recall the words of Jesus over the bread at the beginning of the meal and over one of the cups (probably the third, the so-called "cup of blessing"). Jesus adds to the customary blessing the words "this

The Testament of Jesus

(first part)

prepare his followers for the time to come, when he will no longer be with them in a visible way. In short, this evening occupies symbolically the place of a last will and testament, summing up a whole existence and giving indications for the future.

The four Gospels situate this final meeting during a meal. In the universe of the Bible, just as in most non-Western civilizations still today, meals possess a density of meaning hardly imaginable for those who live in the functional and affluent societies of the Western world. In a world of scarcity, eating one's fill is practically a miracle: it means restoring oneself at the Source of all life. It is not an exaggeration to say that, in the Bible, every meal is a religious event. It is, in addition, a privileged time of sharing between the guests. Those who eat the same bread express in this way that they belong to one and the same family; they weave bonds of communion among themselves. An unrivaled expression of this double communion, with God and among people, a festive meal symbolizes in the Biblical and rabbinical tradition the Kingdom of God, a existence lived to the full, with all its possibilities realized (cf. Luke 14,15-24).

At the same time that resistance to his message and the desire of his opponents to get rid of him reach their climax, Jesus gathers together his companions for a final meal. In all four

to the family to be eaten during a festive meal. When the Israelites left Egypt, the blood of those lambs had been used to protect them from the plague that struck the Egyptians (cf. Ex 12,1-4). This passover symbolism was quite useful to the evangelists to explain the meaning of Jesus' death. Should we not presume that Jesus himself, so rooted in the spiritual history of his people, perceived the same relationship?

In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus' farewell takes place during the Passover supper itself. Preparations for the meal are carefully described and lent a supernatural flavour (Mark 14,12-16 and parallels), as if to emphasize that God himself takes things in hand and prepares, right at the heart of the city of Jerusalem hostile to Jesus, a place where the disciples can celebrate the Passover of their Master. In the Acts of the Apostles, this same "upper room" (Acts 1,13) will be the place from which the first Christian community will set out after Pentecost on its pilgrimage "to the very ends of the earth" (Acts 1,8). For the Jews, the Passover meal is a family celebration, and it is significant that here Jesus celebrates it with "the Twelve" (Mark/Matt) or "the apostles," in other words those sent out (Luke). These expressions tell us that what seems to be just a tiny group is, in fact, the nucleus and the seed of a universal community. God's new family sits at table with Jesus to ex-

press its unity and its identity, before undertaking its pilgrimage to the four corners of the earth. Let us first examine the heart of the story for the synoptics, the Passover meal itself. Surprisingly, there is no mention of the lamb (Ex 12,3), which is at the centre of the Jewish meal. In place of this, the gospel-writers recall the words of Jesus over the bread at the beginning of the meal and over one of the cups (probably the third, the so-called "cup of blessing"). Jesus adds to the customary blessing the words "this is my body (given for you)" and "this is my blood (shed for you)." In this way, he transforms the memorial of the liberation from Egypt which occurred centuries ago, relating it to what will happen the following day when he dies on the cross. He thus "explains" the meaning of his death—it is neither a simple accident nor a failure—and grants to it a lasting meaning: "Do this as a memorial of me."

Even before the words spoken which vary somewhat in the different Gospels, Jesus' gesture itself is an elegant expression of the essential. By his free decision to give himself, Jesus does the only thing that can transform the reign of darkness into the victory of love. He takes the initiative out of the hands of Judas and the chief priests not through a refusal, by running away or by fighting against them, but by expressing fully the loving will of his Father. By accepting to go to the point of dying for love, the meaning of that death is changed radically: the "passion" is no longer passive, but rather the triumphant activity of loving, the springing up of new life. In spite of appearances, Jesus gives his life; it is not taken from him (cf. John 10,18). If Jesus had not celebrated the last supper as he did, we would never know the true meaning of his agony. We would not know that it was in fact a road to life, a paradoxical victory over death from within.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

NOVEMBER

These short readings proposed for reflection are taken from the midday prayer in Taizé. The reference shows where the text was taken from. Sometimes a longer reading is given, for those who wish to set the text in its context.

JOHANNINE HOURS

MARK 4,35-41

1 Fri ALL SAINTS
Jesus said: Happy are the clear in heart: they shall see God. Happy are the peacemakers: they shall be called children of God.

Mt 5:1-12

2 Sat Let us love one another, for love is of God and whoever loves is born of God and knows God.

1 Jn 4:7-11

3 SUN Jesus said: The greatest among you will be your servant.

Mt 23:1-12

4 Mon The Word of God is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart.

Rm 10:5-10

5 Tue The darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Whoever loves their neighbour remains in the light.

1 Jn 2:7-10

6 Wed Jesus asked his first disciples, "What do you want?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."

Jn 1:35-42

7 Thu God finds his people in the desert, in a barren wasteland. He shields them and cares for them, he guards them as the apple of his eye.

Dt 32:8-11

8 Fri Eli told the child Samuel: If you are called again, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

1 S 3:1-18

9 Sat Jesus said: Do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Mt 6:31-34

10 SUN God's Wisdom seeks out those who are upright in heart. On all the paths they tread, she shows herself to them with kindness.

Ws 6:12-19

11 Mon The people asked Jesus, "What must we do to do God's work?" Jesus replied, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Jn 6:27-29

12 Tue You give me your shield of salvation, Lord, and always listen to me. You broaden the path beneath me.

2 S 22:29-37

13 Wed Elijah waited for God on Mount Sinai. A great wind arose, but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then came a fire, but God was not in the fire. After the fire came a voice of silence, and God spoke to Elijah.

1 K 19:8b-13a

14 Thu Do not model yourselves on the pattern of this world, but let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may discern the will of God.

Rm 12:1-13

15 Fri In you, Lord, is the source of life; in your light we see light.

Ps 36

16 Sat Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. Of all seeds it is the smallest, yet once it has grown it is the biggest of plants.

Mt 13:31-32

17 SUN In a parable, the master said to his faithful servant, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a little, I will entrust you with much more. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Mt 25:14-30

18 Mon God is our refuge and strength, and an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be in turmoil.

Ps 46

19 Tue Jesus said: The will of the one who sent me is that I should lose none of those he has given me, but that I should raise them up on the last day.

Jn 6:37-40

20 Wed Jesus said: Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

Mt 12:46-50

21 Thu Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered, "some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Mt 16:13-20

22 Fri Trust in God at all times. Pour out your heart to him.

Ps 62

23 Sat Jesus, risen from the dead, said to his disciples: I am with you always, to the end of time.

Mt 28:16-20

24 SUN Paul writes: If Christ has not been raised then our message is empty and so is your faith. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. For just as all die in Adam, so in Christ all will be brought to life.

1 Co 15:12-28

25 Mon As he was walking along, Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

Mk 2:13-14

26 Tue Jesus said in a parable: Some, like seeds sown in good soil, listen to the Word of God, accept it, and bear much fruit.

Mk 4:1-9,13-20

27 Wed Jesus said: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, they will certainly not lose their reward.

Mk 9:41

28 Thu Jesus said: I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark but will have the light of life.

Jn 8:12

29 Fri Happy are they, who find their strength in you, Lord. As they pass through the valley of tears they make it a place of living springs.

Ps 84

30 Sat St ANDREW Paul writes: There is no difference between persons: all have the same Lord, who generously blesses all who call on him.

Rm 10:11-13

The same evening, Jesus wanted to leave the place where he had spent time teaching. His disciples "took him in the boat just as he was": the departure seemed hurried. Did Jesus feel threatened? He knew that the followers of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, were preparing to do away with him (Mk 3,6). "Crossing to the other side," to "the territory of the Gerasenes," Jesus and his disciples would be out of the reach of Herod's power.

But scarcely had they escaped danger from other human beings than the forces of nature attacked the little fishing boat belonging to those who followed Jesus. Even those experienced fishermen did not know what to do. They no longer recognized their sea of Galilee: the waves were like the open jaws of the great Abyss, ready to swallow them for ever. So they cried out with fear. And their distress was mingled with a reproach: "Don't you care that we are lost?"

Then Jesus woke up. He had absolutely no part in the agitation surrounding him. He spoke two words, and everything quieted down. But how could he have fallen asleep "on the cushion in the stern" during a storm? Only a child could have done this. Jesus was not a child, but, as the psalm says, "he keeps his soul in peace and silence, like a little child in its mother's arms" (Ps 131). The words to calm the storm arose from his silence in God. Centuries later, Isaac of Ninive would say, "Quiet yourself, and heaven and earth will fill you with peace."

By asking "Have you still no faith?" Jesus showed that he did what he did for the sake of our faith. The one whom "wind and the sea obey" also says to the cares, the fears and the suffering that cause turmoil in our souls, "Silence! Be still!" Faith is nourished by the quiet created by the words spoken by Christ.

- How do I react in situations when my experience does not suffice to allow me to find a way out?
- For the disciples, Jesus' words transformed a threatening reality, the stormy sea, into a place where a new encounter with him in peace became possible. What enables us today to find the quiet which is necessary for an act of trust?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

DECEMBER

These short readings proposed for reflection are taken from the midday prayer in Taizé. The reference shows where the text was taken from. Sometimes a longer reading is given, for those who wish to set the text in its context.

JOHANNINE HOURS

ACTS 2,37-41

1 SUN ADVENT
You, Lord, are our Father and Redeemer. You act in favour of those who trust in you and welcome those who accomplish justice joyfully.

Is 63:16b-64:3-7

2 Mon Jesus said to his disciples: Believe in the light so that you may become children of light.

Jn 12:35-36

3 Tue Jesus said: Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and the Father will love them, and we shall come to them and make our home in them.

Jn 14:19-23

4 Wed Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Mk 2:15-17

5 Thu Isaiah said: The mountain of the Lord will rise up higher than the hills, and the peoples of the earth will say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord so that he may teach us his ways.

Is 2:2-5

6 Fri Turn my heart towards your way, and not to selfish gain. By your word give me life.

Ps 119:33-40

7 Sat When they saw Jesus walking on the water, the disciples were terrified. But at once he spoke to them saying, "Have courage, it's me. Don't be afraid."

Mk 6:45-52

8 SUN As it is written in the book of Isaiah, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight", John the Baptist was in the desert announcing a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mk 1:1-8

9 Mon Jesus said: Let the little children come to me, for it is such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

Mk 10:13-16

10 Tue Isaiah said: On that day there shall be no more hurt or violence, for the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the bottom of the sea.

Is 11:1-9

11 Wed Jesus said to a rich man: You lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

Mk 10:17-22

12 Thu Jesus said: Whoever comes to me, listens to my words and acts on them is like someone building a house who digs down deep and lays the foundations on rock.

Lk 6:46-49

13 Fri My soul longs for you in the night, Lord, and deep within me, my spirit seeks you.

Is 26:7-9

14 Sat Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. These are the two greatest commandments.

Mk 12:28-34

15 SUN The Lord sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted and to proclaim freedom to those in captivity.

Is 61:1-3

16 Mon Someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Lk 9:57-62

17 Tue Jesus said: Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Jn 15:1-5

18 Wed Console my people, says your God, console them and speak to their hearts.

Is 40:1-5

19 Thu Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed is she who believed that the promise the Lord made her would be fulfilled.

Lk 1:39-45

20 Fri The Lord says: Why do you complain, my people, saying, "My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by God"? Do you not know? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the world; he does not tire or grow weary.

Is 40:25-28

21 Sat Jesus said to his disciples: I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends, because everything I have learnt from my Father I have made known to you.

Jn 15:15-17

22 SUN The angel said to Mary: Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

Lk 1:26-38

23 Mon Bless the Lord, my soul; let all that is in me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, my soul; forget none of his good deeds.

Ps 103

24 Tue At John the Baptist's birth, Zechariah said: Blessed be God, for he allows us to serve him without fear.

Lk 1:67-79

25 Wed CHRISTMAS
The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. And this will be his name: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Is 9:1-6

26 Thu St STEPHEN
Life itself became visible, we saw it and testify to it. We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was revealed to us.

1 Jn 1:1-4

27 Fri St JOHN
Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah: My servant will not quarrel or cry out, he will not snuff out the smouldering wick. All the nations will put their hope in him.

Mt 12:14-21

28 Sat Those who hope in the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not be tired.

Is 40:29-31

29 SUN Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. The Lord has forgiven you, do the same in your turn.

Col 3:12-17

30 Mon This is love: not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins.

1 Jn 4:7-11

31 Tue Jesus' disciples came to him and he taught them saying: Happy are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Mt 5:1-12

Peter had just spoke openly of the injustice which Jesus suffered: his death was the murder of an innocent, of the Innocent who, moreover, was destined to be the Messiah, the Saviour of his people! It is obvious that Peter's words cut his hearers' hearts to the quick. God had sent his Christ, and they killed him! Had they not missed their chance, once and for all? An evil act was committed; it could not be undone. Their question expressed their dismay: "What must we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent." The expression "repent" means changing one's heart, one's mind, one's attitude. It is close to the expression "be converted," which means turn around, return, turn away from evil and turn towards God. Repenting means separating oneself from the evil we have committed. But is this possible? Should we not take responsibility for our actions and take the consequences upon ourselves? Peter said that in raising Jesus from the dead, God gave repentance. That means that he enabled those who killed him to separate themselves from the evil they had committed (Ac 5,31). By restoring Jesus to life, God wiped out the injustice of his being put to death. When we hear the word "Repent," we can understand that God gives us the incredible possibility of separating ourselves from a past that was keeping us captive.

Peter added: "...and every one of you must be baptized." Baptism is the guarantee of the reality of our repentance. It is not only that I separate myself from my evil past; it is God who frees me by his forgiveness. The first Christians liked to compare baptism to the crossing of the Red Sea. The sea closed behind the Hebrews when they left the land of slavery. It stood in the way of Pharaoh's soldiers who wanted to catch them. Through baptism, God places Christ between us and our faults. And that is not only true on the day when we were baptized. Every day we are baptized people. God makes our repentance a reality each day. Day after day, he reactivates that separation from sin which was our baptism. And then we are free to separate ourselves from the bad habits and routines that are shared by a whole society and that put its future in danger (cf. v.40).

- What enables me to undergo new beginnings in my life?

- What keeps me from being myself? How can I find a source of freedom in baptism and in repentance?



Listening to the Continents

Russia

Peace on Your Home!

The following lines were received from a young woman who had been to Taizé:

I live 200 kilometres from Moscow. I am a dancing teacher and I teach three groups of children. I enjoy my work and the contact with children helps me to see the world through their eyes.

When I came to Taizé for the first time, I realized how lost we are when we leave our country. We are like mute children who have a lot to say but who are unable to say it. At home in Russia, we are still afraid of many things, and therefore mistrustful. Probably this has been handed down to us by our parents. But love, kindness, mutual respect, trust and attention to others will heal our fears. In Taizé, I forgot my fear.

Where I come from, most people are completely trapped in their own personal problems: how can they feed their families and survive? Unemployment, grinding poverty, crime and indifference have made people aggressive. In despair, some turn to alcohol or to drugs; others wait for a miracle. I see the young people of my town caught in a quagmire. Some get used to the mud; others try to get out and to help others to escape. How can our Orthodox Church discover a way to help them find a meaning for their lives?

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Taizé
EUROPEAN
MEETING OF
YOUNG ADULTS
Stuttgart
28th december
- 1st January '96/97

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for example someone who works with the poorest native peoples of Ecuador.

The presence of young people from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Macedonian Republic, Yugoslavia and Albania was deeply appreciated by all the participants. As in previous years, several children from Bosnia spent the summer in Taizé.

The many visitors always include some bishops. The Bishop of Karachi in Pakistan, a Lutheran bishop from Finland, the Anglican bishop of Canberra, the Catholic bishop of Pondicherry, the Anglican bishop of Assam, bishops from the United States, Rotterdam, Taipei, and the bishop of Autun, in whose diocese Taizé is located, came to Taizé for a few hours or a few days. Three Anglican bishops spent a week in Taizé along with groups of young people from their dioceses.

The life-commitment of a brother of the community from India, and the entry into the community of two new brothers from Brazil and Britain, allowed all those present to share the community's joy.

Welcoming so many people would not be possible without the presence of a hundred young people from every country who agree to help out for several weeks by taking on different responsibilities:

"I stayed in Taizé for over five weeks this summer," writes one of them, "welcomed by the sisters. In the middle of the summer, there were many of us, from all backgrounds. I could never have imagined such a warm mutual welcome between people coming from so many different cultures. The fact of taking meals in common and having a place to be together enabled us to support one another in the more difficult times. I really enjoyed working in Olinda, with the group for families with children. Everyone was struck by the introductions given by the brothers each morning—a Bible introduction adapted for the children, with marionettes, and then a Bible introduction for the parents. It was surprising to see those children and their parents, of all nationalities, react in the same way and grasp the Gospel message. I would never have believed it possible for eight-year-old children with no common language not only to enjoy playing together but to share. I remember especially a sharing on the theme of jealousy (the morning's introduction dealt with the story of Cain and Abel) between three English girls, a Polish girl and a German boy, all eight years old. I don't think I have ever seen such attentive listening between children. The families who take part in the family group for a week would never have any reason to meet otherwise; their lifestyles and their choices are so different. But for the parents too, listening and searching together are possible."

India

With Street Children

This letter arrived from a young man from New Delhi who was in Taizé in August 1993:

I am happy to share with you about my work with street children. The youth groups in the parishes are not able to do much for them, so it is my personal interest that brings me towards them. These children initially are very shy to meet or speak. But once they are open with you they would give you their hearts. They are very loving and respectful. They are very much affected by their surroundings. Many don't have families or were abandoned by their parents when they were infants. They work in small tea-shops or pick rags from the garbage. There are girls who face sexual abuse. Many boys are addicted to drugs.

Once you meet them you can feel the pain and the suffering. I feel very helpless not to do much for them, as I myself am not settled yet. But I love them and I show and share the love of God with them as much as possible. There are many organizations who run small schools for these children and I visit such schools many times. Some of these kids are very good at studies and arts. They have a great potential to survive. They have their dreams and plans despite knowing their status in society. People think they are thieves and pickpockets, and they don't get jobs easily because people don't trust them. But I see that they are steadfast in their aims.

Estonia

The Joy of Being Together

A great need was felt in Tartu, the university town of Estonia, to give students the possibility of meeting to pray and to share about their Christian life. So a pastor brought a few students together and we began a student parish. This kind of parish had existed during our First Republic and so we re-established it. We were happy to see that this idea was warmly welcomed by the students, and also by the professors. The parish began a year ago, and already we are many. We pray together on Sunday twice a month, and every morning there is a prayer at the university as well as one evening a week. It is important for us to listen to witnesses, for instance an Estonian woman who works as a missionary in the Urals among the small Finno-Ugrian peoples. We organize camps and pilgrimages. Since the students come from

throughout the country, we hope that when they return home, they will take back with them something of this experience of Church and of Christian life, of the joy of being together.

Italy

A City-Wide Prayer

For ten years now, young people from Genoa have been meeting once a month for a prayer that brings together several hundred people. This prayer began after the second European meeting in Barcelona. When the crypt of Santo Stefano Church became too small, the prayer was moved to San Siro. There, it is a sign of sharing and of hope in one of the most neglected zones of the central city. This prayer is simple, so that everybody can feel at ease when meeting Christ. It is also characterized by a concern for openness so that it may be truly a city-wide prayer, and not be limited to one place or one community.

This year, we selected "trust" as the basic theme. Each month, we choose texts linked to this theme. We are reflecting more deeply on the dimensions of trust in God, but also in others and in oneself. In this way we see how God's love for us is a source of trust, through the ever renewed forgiveness that Jesus offers us in the Gospel.

Letter from Taizé

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